

Statement of General A. A. Vandegrift, Commandant of the Marine Corps before the Senate Armed Services Committee on S. 758, the National Security Act of 1947.

22 April 47

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

As Commandant of Marines and spokesman for our Corps, I desire to discuss certain features of the pending measure.

I have never opposed the principle of unification, although I have expressed strong disapproval of the objectives underlying the original Collins Plan for outright merger of the armed forces. I am in accord with the over-all objectives which the bill now under consideration seeks to attain.

Since reading some of the testimony which has been given before this Committee, particularly that of General Eisenhower and the Under Secretary of War, Mr. Royall, I have become increasingly concerned about the danger of lessening the degree of civilian, including Congressional, control over our military establishment by concentrating great powers in a single individual. As a result of this testimony I have become apprehensive of the results that may ensue unless those powers are more sharply defined and there is a clearer meeting of minds as to just what authority is vested in the Secretary of National Defense.

I think it is apparent to everyone that this is a bill of the broadest national character, with a heavy impact upon the civilian as well as the military structure. I am sure that any imperfections will be adequately dealt with by other witnesses called before this Committee, witnesses who are leaders in the fields of government, education, science, industry, and labor, and who are competent to speak in the broad terms necessary. My own comments will be confined to the military aspects of the bill, and within that field I shall limit myself still further to those defects of immediate concern to the Marines.

Stated concisely and with respect to the Marine Corps, the defects of the bill are twofold:

First: It affirms the existence of the Marine Corps without expressly stating the roles and missions which the Corps is expected to perform.

Second: It completely excludes the Marine Corps from participation in the joint bodies and agencies which the bill would establish.

In the balance of my statement, I shall elaborate upon these defects and attempt to convey to you their full import.

The failure of the bill to assign specific functions to the Marine Corps is a source of grave concern to me, for it allows the Corps to be stripped of everything but name--to reduce it to a role of military impotence. I wish to dwell upon the position of extreme vulnerability in which the Corps will be placed by enactment of the bill in its present form.

Unless a statutory statement of the missions of the Marine Corps is included, its functions become dependent solely upon the arbitrary judgment of the Secretary of National Defense. The size, the character, and the organization of the Corps will lie in his hands. There is not a single specialty which the Marine Corps has brought to a state of perfection which cannot be summarily transferred to some other service.

Section 106 of the bill, which contains the sole mention of the Marines and which goes no further than to affirm the presence of a Marine Corps within the Department of the Navy, contains no guarantee that the Corps will retain a single one of the characteristics it has today, with the one exception of its name. As a guarantee of vigorous Marine Corps existence, Section 106 is completely without meaning unless it is accompanied by a statement of what the roles and missions of the Marine Corps shall be.

I believe that Congress and the people have a clear-cut idea as to the sort of Marine Corps they wish to maintain. I believe that they wish to maintain in the future the same kind of a Marine Corps they have known in the past--one which serves aboard our ships of war and guards our naval stations--one which protects our national interests on foreign shores when danger threatens--above all, one which has developed amphibious warfare and which stands ready in substantial force to sail with the fleet to wage such warfare whenever and wherever the occasion arises.

There is only one way to insure that the nation shall have this kind of Marine Corps. That insurance--that guarantee--is a plain and unmistakable legislative statement of exactly what Congress expects the Marines to do.

I regard it as highly appropriate, as well as urgently necessary, that Congress specify the functions of the Corps. To do so is no more than to state the reasons for its existence. When Congress calls the several armed services into being, it recognizes a specific need for each of the several components of national security. The very existence of each component is predicated upon a conclusion by Congress that a mission actually exists--that a role must be filled.

As specifically relates to the Marine Corps, Congress should ask itself whether the traditional need for an amphibious fighting force-in-being still exists--whether the need for a Marine Corps is in fact justified by the events of the past and forecasts of

the future. If it determines the Marine Corps' function is still to exist, then it should be set forth in law--otherwise the implicit will of Congress can be utterly, and legally, ignored.

The other defect of the bill, as it affects the Marine Corps, is the exclusion of Marine representatives from the joint bodies and agencies to be established or given statutory recognition by the bill. From the Joint Staff down to the Central Intelligence Agency, the participation of Marine officers is not mentioned. As the bill now stands, it denies to these joint bodies the wealth of experience and unique knowledge of a Corps which literally epitomizes joint operations.

The Marine Corps has participated in joint operations throughout its entire existence. The joint doctrines of both the Army and the Navy today are in large part the results of the research, study, and thinking of Marine officers who, for twenty years prior to Pearl Harbor, devoted their conscientious and unceasing efforts to the formulation and perfection of the methods and techniques of amphibious warfare in joint operations. I ask that Marine officers be included in the several joint boards and agencies. I ask it because they have a distinct and substantial contribution to make in the field of inter-service coordination, a contribution born of their experience.

I stated in my opening remarks, and I repeat in closing, that I am in accord with the objectives which this bill seeks to obtain. With respect to the Marine Corps, the necessary changes are few in number and simple in character--the insertion of a clear statement of the status and functions of the Corps, and a slight rewording of certain sections to provide for Marine Corps representation in the appropriate joint bodies and agencies. I am prepared to submit draft amendments which will accomplish these changes.